



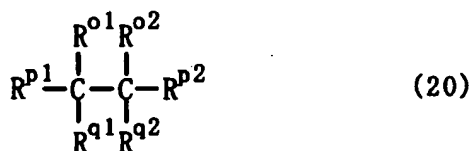
wherein each of  $R^{o1}$ ,  $R^{p1}$  and  $R^{q1}$  is, identical to or different from one another, an organic group, where  $R^{o1}$ ,  $R^{p1}$  and  $R^{q1}$  may be combined to form a ring with the adjacent carbon atom,

is allowed to react with (B22) a compound having a methine carbon atom and being shown by the following formula (14b):



wherein each of  $R^{o2}$ ,  $R^{p2}$  and  $R^{q2}$  is, identical to or different from one another, an organic group, where  $R^{o2}$ ,  $R^{p2}$  and  $R^{q2}$  may be combined to form a ring with the adjacent carbon atom,

in the presence of molecular oxygen by catalysis of the imide compound of the formula (1), to yield a coupling product shown by the following formula (20):



wherein  $R^{o1}$ ,  $R^{p1}$ ,  $R^{q1}$ ,  $R^{o2}$ ,  $R^{p2}$  and  $R^{q2}$  have the same meanings as defined above.

21. (original) A process according to one of claims 1 <sup>or</sup> ~~to~~ 3 and ~~14 to 20~~, wherein a metallic compound is used as a co-catalyst. 7a  
10/4/06

22. (cancelled).

23. (previously presented) A process according to claim 3 for preparing  $\alpha$ -hydroxy- $\gamma$ , $\gamma$ -dimethyl- $\gamma$ -butyrolactone, in which: